

ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

Experimental film in Los Angeles, 1945 - 1980

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INTERVIEW SUBJECT: Lewis Teague

Biography:

Lewis Teague is a programmer, theater manager and director based out of Los Angeles, California. Teague, a student from NYU film school, moved to Los Angeles during the early 1960s as a participant in a Universal Studios apprentice director program and directed an episode of the Alfred Hitchcock Hour. He soon became involved in the city's rock n' roll scene and decided to try his hand at film programming. In 1964, he took over a small store-front theater on the sunset strip. The theater was owned by Robert Lippard, an exploitation producer, who unsuccessfully attempted to use it to screen nudie cuties and soft-core pornography. When Teague became manager he renamed the theater Cinematheque 16 and began to program art films and documentaries. Attendance at early screenings was minimal until Teague debuted a series of evenings of 'Psychedelic Film Trips' that included works by Brakhage, Emshwiller, Warhol, and the Whitneys and appealed to the local hippie population. Teague supplemented the regular schedule with open screenings (to which Jim Morrison brought his student films). The theater became popular amongst young filmmakers and Jeffery Perkins and Peter Mays became regulars. Evenings often ended with a trip to Barney's Beanery followed by breakfast at Canters.

Noting Teague's success, Frank Woods, theatrical entrepreneur and producer, bought the theater and opened another Cinematheque 16 in Pasadena, which quickly failed, and in San Francisco, which became as successful as the one on Sunset Strip. After leaving the Cinematheque 16 Teague devoted his efforts to directing full-time and helmed films including JEWEL OF THE NILE and CUJO. He is currently a director living in Los Angeles.

Filmography:

It's About This Carpenter (1965, 16mm, sound, black and white, 13:00)

Dirty O'Neil (1974, 35mm, sound, color, 89:00)

The Lady in Red (1979, 35mm, sound, color, 93:00)

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Interviewer: Alison Kozberg

Cameraperson: Marcy Saude

Transcript Reviewer: Adam Hyman, Elizabeth Hesik

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Interview date: June 19, 2010

Interviewer: Alison Kozberg

Cameraperson: Marcy Saude

Transcript Reviewer: Adam Hyman, Elizabeth Hesik

TAPE 1: LEWIS TEAGUE

00:00:53

ALISON KOZBERG

All right. So it is June 19, 2010, and this is Lewis Teague's oral history. And for the transcriber, will you start by stating and spelling your name?

00:01:03

LEWIS TEAGUE

I'm Lewis Teague and that's L-e-w-i-s capital T-e-a-g-u-e.

00:01:11

ALISON KOZBERG

All right. And let's start by getting a little bit of your background. Where are you from, originally?

00:01:18

LEWIS TEAGUE

I was born in New York. I was born in Brooklyn. Grew up on the east coast. Moved around a lot was--had every intention of becoming an artist, at least a comic book artist, if not a fine artist living in a garret in Greenwich Village when I grew up. But I got into trouble, got kicked out of high school, joined the Army, discovered German beer, stopped drawing and painting. And when I got out of the Army, I decided that I did want to do something with my life and was unsure, at that point, about art or at least being an artist.

00:01:58

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So I thought if I got--if I could get into college, maybe I could expand my horizons and discover what I wanted to do. And in my third year or at the end of my second year at NYU, which I managed to get into without a high school diploma, I accidentally took a film production class. Loved it, got hit by a bolt of lightning and knew that that's what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I wanted to be a film maker.

00:02:27

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

Made a bunch of shorts at NYU that won me a scholarship and a director's contract at Universal. So before I finished college at NYU, I wound up moving out to L.A. and apprenticing at Universal with Sydney Pollack and directed an "[The] Alfred Hitchcock Hour." That's what had they promised me. I'd get to direct one TV show and I really wasn't able to follow up on that right away and do something else. And so I wound up drifting for a few months. And during that time, the Beatles came and played the Hollywood Bowl and changed my life forever. [interviewer laughs]

00:03:14

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

I grew long hair, started smoking pot and dropped out, which coincided with Universal's desire to let me go at that time, since I hadn't followed up [interviewer laughs] on that "[The] Alfred Hitchcock Hour," which I directed. So there I was, long hair, smoking pot and watching the hippie movement invade L.A. trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life. And I decided that I'd open up a little movie theater on Sunset Strip called the Cinematheque 16.

00:03:53

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

Because it already had a 16 milli--the theater already existed. A guy named Robert Lippard, who owned a theater chain and produced really, really low budget movies, had opened up this theater as a--what they called in those days, a nudie, cutie theater. This is the pre-porn era. And what it did, they just showed girls with big boobs dancing around and that kind of stuff. But when the hippies took over Sunset Strip, it was amazing.

00:04:27

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

In 1965, was almost overnight, suddenly, the Sunset Strip was invaded by thousands and thousands of young people who were smoking dope and looking for rock and roll and an alternative lifestyle. And the traffic on Sunset Strip--it seemed to happen almost overnight. And as traffic was really crowded, it came to a standstill. And so a lot of conventional businesses went out of business during that period. And one of the casualties was this nudie, cutie house because guys in raincoats, who wanted to be titillated, didn't want to go down and mingle with the hippies.

00:05:10

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So Robert Lippard owned this little theater, did not know what to do with it. And so a friend of mine and I convinced him to turn it--my friend, by the way, is Fred Roos, who is Francis [Ford] Coppolla's main producer.

00:05:24

ALISON KOZBERG

How do you spell his last name?

00:05:26

LEWIS TEAGUE

R-double o-s. Fred Roos.

00:05:26

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay.

00:05:29

LEWIS TEAGUE

Fred Roos was a friend of Lippard's. Because Fred had--Jack Nicholson was making movies--was writing and directing. Jack, at that time, apparently had no desire to be an actor. He was a very smart guy and liked writing and he was writing and producing low budget films in the Philippines for this guy, Robert Lippard, and Fred Roos was helping him produce them. Fred went on to become the producer of almost all of Coppola's movies, like GODFATHER and he also--he was also a great casting director.

00:06:11

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

But anyway, Fred knew Lippard. Fred knew me. Fred put us together. I had an idea to convert this little theater with a 16 millimeter projector into an experimental movie theater. I didn't call it at--I didn't want it to be a, quote, experimental theater necessarily. I just wanted to have a little 16 millimeter cinematheque type theater where I could show my favorite films and favorite directors that wouldn't ordinarily get into the commercial movie theaters at that time.

00:06:47

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

My first two--my first week I had a Robert Flaherty retrospective; Robert Flaherty, documentary filmmaker, directed NANUCK OF THE NORTH. And I think about eight people came to that. The second week, I had already programmed these programs and done the advertising. The second week, I did an Ermanno Olmi retrospective, Ermanno Olmi, my favorite Italian director, and I think maybe 12 people came that week.

00:07:16

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So Lippard, who owned the theater still--I was running it and programming it doing--I was doing all the advertising, but Lippard was taking the losses. And he was beginning to worry. And I'd already programmed the third program, which was called The Best of the New York Underground, and had people like Stan Vanderbeek and Brakhage and people like that--shorts from people like that. And I was really starting to worry now and I thought, well, maybe I should take a different approach.

00:07:49

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And this is where I learned a lot about marketing. I called the L.A. TIMES. I said, forget that ad. I'm going to come up with a new ad for this program. And I came up with the idea Acid Film Trips, Number One. [interviewer laughs] And that week we had lines going all the way around the block. And kids coming in, who were loaded, wanting to see something that would get them more loaded on the screen.

00:08:17

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And the great thing about it was that they really appreciated and got the films because they weren't looking for a linear narrative experience in a movie. They were looking for something that would expand their brains a little bit while they were already a little high. And it was great. We--so anyway, we had Acid Film Trips Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight. We--and then we would bring them back.

00:08:43

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So I had a lot of fun because it was a period where I could show films that wouldn't ordinarily get screened, maybe occasionally on the Late, Late Show or--and even then, as a lot of my films that I wanted to see were too obscure to even see on late night television. So it was a great opportunity for me to show some of my favorite films and it was also an opportunity for me to show films that were being made by young filmmakers who were experimenting.

00:09:23

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

Because you've to understand, at that time, we're talking about 1965 when I opened that theater. I opened it and ran it for about three years, '65 to '68. At that time, the film business was pretty much locked up by the unions. Not just the Director's Guild, the IA, Teamsters, but by the Projectionist Union. Projectionists in regular theaters would not--they were all unionized in those days and they would not show a film that didn't have a union seal on it.

00:09:58

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

If it wasn't made by the IA, they wouldn't run it. So newcomers like Jack Nicholson and myself and Dennis Hopper and people like that were having a hard time breaking into the film business. And so a lot of these people were making little experimental films in 16. I was making little films in 16 during that time. Jim Morrison, who was a film student at UCLA, was bringing in films. Every Saturday night--our shows ended about 11:30 and every Saturday night, people would come in with little hundred foot rolls of film that they'd shot.

00:10:40

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And we'd lock the doors and crack open a couple cans of beer, light up some weed and start running these little films. We'd run them for a few hours. Then afterwards, we'd all go over to the Whiskey and Go-Go and dance and hear great music or go down to Barney's Beanery, which was a big hangout in those days when Barney was still alive. When Barney was still alive, Barney's Beanery was the cultural center of Los Angeles. Writers, filmmakers, artists hung out in Barney's Beanery.

00:11:16 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

So anyway, I ran that theater for three years. I had a lot of fun doing it, but it kind of--after about three years what--I wound up running a lot of Andy Warhol films. Now, initially, as I was mentioning earlier, I like Andy Warhol's films, films like BIKER BOY and--they were very pure. He would turn the camera on for an hour until--a close-up of somebody's face until their personality--all the masks and pretenses that people put up would begin to disintegrate under the unending glare of the camera and passage of time.

00:12:08 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And there was something fascinating about that. But then he got shot and he let his right-hand guy, his business guy, Paul Morrissey start producing the films under his guidance. Morrissey--they were also good interesting films, but they were more narrative and a little more conventional. But they all made money. Warhol had a reputation. And whenever I ran an Andy Warhol film, the--I had to running it, I had to keep it in the theater as long as it was making money.

00:12:44 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

Because there was a shortage of product. And after Acid Film Trip 17 or something like that, I was just repeating earlier shows and people stopped coming to those shows. The only thing--the only shows that people--that made any money after a couple years were the Andy Warhol films. And I got bored, basically, and turned it over to somebody else and left. I had an opportunity to get back into filmmaking. A friend of mine was producing a film, asked me--back in New York and asked me if I wanted to work on it.

00:13:21 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

I really wanted to get back into movie making myself and I had made--I was always running around with a 16 millimeter camera doing a little exercise of some kind. But I really wanted to get back into the movie business so that's when I turned over the job of running the cinema tech to another guy and left.

00:13:45 **ALISON KOZBERG**

I'm just going to ask you some follow-up questions.

00:13:48 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Sure.

00:13:48 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Because we just went through a lot of information. So I'm going to go back and kind of fill in some gaps. First of all, so you said you are from New York, originally, but that you moved around a lot on the east coast and then were stationed in the Army. Where were you stationed? Where did you go abroad?

00:14:06

LEWIS TEAGUE

I was stationed in Germany. I was stationed in Ul, which is in Bavaria and then in Manheim. And we moved around a lot, but it was always in the New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Westchester kind of area.

00:14:25

ALISON KOZBERG

Now, were you interested in kind of art culture, counter-culture growing up or in rock music or anything like that? Or not yet, not until later?

00:14:34

LEWIS TEAGUE

Well, was I interested in rock music?

00:14:38

ALISON KOZBERG

Yeah.

00:14:39

LEWIS TEAGUE

Oh, absolutely. I was--initially I was interested in jazz and listened to a lot of jazz. Then around 1952, there was a lot of rhythm and blues appearing on the radio and I was a big fan of rhythm and blues. And then, so my musical influences were primarily jazz, rhythm and blues and then later, rock and roll.

00:15:16

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay. So you went to NYU right after you got out of the army?

00:15:21

LEWIS TEAGUE

While I was in the army, I decided I wanted to go back to school. At that point, I was a high school drop-out, but I had an opportunity to take some equivalency tests while I was in the army and scored in the 99th percentile. And on the basis of that was able to get an interview at NYU. They asked me to write an essay why I wanted to go back to school and I did. And to my amazement, they did let me in [interviewer laughs] and I did fairly well.

00:15:55

ALISON KOZBERG

What--now, you initially you entered as a film student or you were going to study...

00:15:58

LEWIS TEAGUE

No. Initially, I was an art and English literature major.

00:16:01

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay. And then, you took the film class and during your very last...

00:16:06

LEWIS TEAGUE

[overlapping] At the end of the second semester, at the end of my second year, I had to fill out my schedule and was looking for an easy-A type course [interviewer laughs] saw a beginning film production in eight millimeter and thought that would be fun. And I made a little eight millimeter film and love it. Had the same--when I was growing up, the one thing that gave me confidence in myself was my drawing and painting and art. And I--when I made that eight millimeter film, I felt the same thing times ten--to the--and so was totally convinced that's what I wanted to do.

00:16:53

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And that earned me the director's contract at Universal. That brought me out to California. And even though I had a setback after I directed an "[The] Alfred Hitchcock Hour" TV show--which was okay, but I mean, it was certainly air-able it's--you can see it on my IMDB site, as a matter of fact. I looked at it recently. I thought it was pretty good. But I was still real young. I was still a kid with braces on my teeth.

00:17:26

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And in a business where the average age of a director was 65 and I had a very hard time following up on that directing experience. And while I was waiting and trying to connive my next job, Walter Hill, director who directed HAWAII, I met him. And he asked me if I would be interested in helping on HAWAII. He needed somebody to coordinate all the research and direct all the background action.

00:17:57

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So if Max von Sydow and Julie Andrews were walking down the beach and in the background somebody was making a dugout canoe, they'd be using the right tools. And if kids were playing a game, they would be playing a game authentic to ancient Polynesia. So I thought that would be fun and I went off and did that. And so I sort of got separated from Universal in the process and that's when--so when I came back from Hawaii, my contacts at Universal said, you know, you haven't followed up on that original directing opportunity and so we are terminating your contract.

00:18:40 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And around that time, Fred Roos had introduced me to Lippard and offered me this opportunity to run the little theater and I thought that would be fun. Because again, to get back to experimental filmmaking, while I was at NYU making shorts, I was experiencing a certain style, a certain kind of filmmaking that I really liked. My influences were primarily the French New Wave rather than the classic American cinema. Unlike my classmate, Marty Scorsese, whose idols were Howard Hawks and John Ford and all of those people, my model--my idols were Jean Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Jacque Rivette, all the French filmmakers.

00:19:27 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And it was really a film like BREATHLESS, which was very much an experimental film, that inspired me to want to get into filmmaking.

00:19:39 **MARK TOSCANO**

So what kind of stuff did you make at NYU, though? What were your films like?

00:19:42 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Well, I did a--well, the one that got me the contract was called IT'S ABOUT THIS CARPENTER and it's sort of--it was a little bit pretentious. It was a Jesus metaphor about a carpenter living in the village who has to manufacture a cross for a church uptown and deliver it. And in the process of delivering it, he is attacked and harassed by various people. And I thought it would be--it was a fun idea. And it also allowed me to shoot in a style that I was interested in.

00:20:17 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

Because at the same time that the French New Wave was appearing in New York there was a coterie of documentary filmmakers, Ricky Leacock, Albert Maysles, [D.A.] Pennebaker, who were inventing new cameras or reconstructing cameras that allowed them to hand-hold blimped cameras that could shoot double-system sound. Prior to that point, when you shot a documentary, your sound was usually recorded on 16 millimeter film at that time. They had a film that had a magnetic stripe down one side and perforations down the other.

00:21:05 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And so you could record sound on the film while you were shooting. It was called single-system sound. And the cameras that could do that were a little too large and they were always operated on tripods. So documentaries up to 1960 were usually very structured and static. Well, Pennebaker, Leacock and Maysles took old Auricon cameras and they were silent enough that you could use them to record sound and refit them so they could be handheld.

00:21:47

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

There was a lens that was invented around that time called an Angenieux zoom lens and there was a sound company called Nagra that invented a little magnetic sound. All of those developments occurred in the early '60s. So the Maysles were doing films like PRIMARY and CUBA SÍ and I thought those shows were real exciting. And my desire was to combine that freedom with narrative storytelling. And when I saw BREATHLESS, it was--in that sort of a style. The cameraman, I think that was Raoul Coutard, was that correct?

00:22:30

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And Raoul Coutard was the cameraman on BREATHLESS and, you know, they were handholding, he was running around in a wheelchair. And Godard was jump-cutting the movie. I saw Godard's BREATHLESS recently and it looks as fresh and new as it did when it first came out. Which means that it--at that time, at that context, it was really exciting for me. So that's the kind of filmmaking that I wanted to make. So when I did my little short, it's about this carpenter.

00:22:59

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

I structured it and I wrote the script, but then I took the actor out and I put him in real situations to see what would happen. For example, there was a Saint Patrick's Day parade and so I had--I wanted to get him crossing through the Saint Patrick's Day parade. There was a band of nuns marching and then a Catholic band coming up behind them. And of course, anybody who has been in New York and knows Saint Patrick's Day, there are a lot drunken Irishmen--drunken Catholic Irishmen watching the parade.

00:23:33

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And they took offense to this guy with a beard and carrying a cross on his back, running through their parade. And it was a mob--he was mobbed and attacked and his nose was broken. [interviewer laughs] And I got it all on film so--actually, I didn't get it all on film because we did run to his rescue. but I had got enough wide shots on film that I was able to go back the next week with a small group friends and shoot inserts to get the actual fight and him getting hit.

00:24:04

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So that was--it was experimental in that sense and it was a lot of fun for me to do. Now, when I came to Hollywood and directed "The Alfred Hitchcock Hour," it was very much old-fashioned filmmaking, with gigantic Mitchell cameras on dollies and tripods that can't be moved very easily. And if they are moved, it requires an hour to put down track or balance plywood boards. And I had no freedom to experiment and do anything that I thought was interesting.

00:24:42 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

So when they let my contract go, I was happy because that wasn't the kind of moviemaking that I was really interested in.

00:24:49 **MARK TOSCANO**

At the time, at NYU, were you seeing what we would consider experimental films as well?

00:24:55 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Not really, no. No. To some degree, to some degree, yeah. But I and most of my friends--film student friends people who were in class with me..and I was in an interesting class. Jim McBride was in my class and he helped me edit my student film. Martin Scorsese was in my class. Brian DePalma. There were a lot of talented filmmakers there. And we wanted to make features, really, eventually. That was our desire.

00:25:26 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

So we were seeing experimental films, but we were more interested in what was going on in the world of narrative filmmaking.

00:25:34 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Do you remember where in New York you were going to the movies, where you were seeing Breathless or Primary or...

00:25:41 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

In the 8th street Cinema, the Waverly, mainly. A couple others. A couple other theaters in that area.

00:25:50 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Okay. And which episode of "The Alfred Hitchcock Hour" was it that you directed?

00:25:55 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

It's called Second Verdict and it had a great cast; starring Marty Landau, Sharon Farrell, Frank Gorshin, John Marley, among others. So it was a great cast and you can see it on my IMDB site. [interviewer laughs]

00:26:14 **MARK TOSCANO**

I've seen IT'S ABOUT THIS CARPENTER.

00:26:16 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

You have?

00:26:17 **MARK TOSCANO**

Yeah.

00:26:17 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

How'd you see it? [interviewer laughs] I'm trying to get a hold of a copy.

00:26:20

MARK TOSCANO

Oh, yeah? We have a--in addition to the Filmforum thing, I work for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in the film archive. And we have part of this Creative Film Society Collection and they still haven't printed it. So that's--so that was my next question, is did--obviously, you had it distributed with them, at some point, With CFS.

00:26:37

LEWIS TEAGUE

I probably had a what?

00:26:38

MARK TOSCANO

You had it distributed with CFS, Creative Film Society, and Bob Pike.

00:26:43

LEWIS TEAGUE

Not to my knowledge, when I left NYU, I heard that they were showing it a lot, but it didn't know if it was sold or released or distributed to anybody. Nobody bothered to inform me of that so...

00:27:00

MARK TOSCANO

If you want to come by and see it, we have a print.

00:27:03

LEWIS TEAGUE

Oh, I'd love to, very much so.

00:27:04

MARK TOSCANO

[unintelligible]

00:27:05

LEWIS TEAGUE

Is it somewhere I can get it digitized?

00:27:07

MARK TOSCANO

Yeah, we could transfer it for you.

00:27:09

LEWIS TEAGUE

Oh, wonderful.

00:27:09

MARK TOSCANO

Yeah, the quality, you know, it's not going to be absolutely beautiful, professional, but it will be totally viewable, if you want to check it out.

00:27:17

LEWIS TEAGUE

Do you have it on tape or..

00:27:18

MARK TOSCANO

It's a 16 print.

00:27:19

LEWIS TEAGUE

A 16 print.

00:27:20

MARK TOSCANO

Yeah.

00:27:20

LEWIS TEAGUE

Well, now why couldn't it be digitized? Theoretically, the digital copy should look as good as a 16 millimeter print.

00:27:29

MARK TOSCANO

[overlapping] Well, because the set-up we have for doing it in-house is not like a professional sound [unintelligible]. But it's--we use it for making reference copies of stuff. But if we were to send it out, it would cost a few hundred bucks or something like that. So we just...

00:27:39

LEWIS TEAGUE

Well, maybe would you allow me to pay for it?

00:27:41

MARK TOSCANO

Yeah, if you want, yeah.

00:27:41

LEWIS TEAGUE

Oh, okay. Good. Because there's a place on Santa Monica, down here just east of Beverly Glen, that does film to digital transfers and that kind of stuff I use occasionally. They do a good job.

00:27:55

MARK TOSCANO

Yeah, we can send it out. What--did you make other films at NYU, though?

00:28:02

LEWIS TEAGUE

Yeah, I did. Nothing worth talking about, though. IT'S ABOUT THIS CARPENTER was the one that got me my scholarship and the contract at Universal.

00:28:15

ALISON KOZBERG

When did you start seeing, and where, what we would consider experimental films? When did you start to see those films?

00:28:30

LEWIS TEAGUE

I must have started seeing them when I was in New York in college because when I started programming for the Cinematheque I was aware of these people, I was aware of the names and I was able to start researching them. But I also had contacts at distributors back East and I can't remember their names anymore. I'd call them for suggestions and maybe I'd--there was certain filmmakers like Brakhage and Vanderbeek, who I was very fond of and couple guys from the Canadian Film Board, whose names I can't remember right now. And they would send me those film and plus they'd say--they'd describe other films that they thought were really cool. And they would send those out and I'd put together a program.

00:29:25 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

So I started looking at experimental films--I must have started when I was in college, but none of them had made enough of an impact on me, at that point, that i could remember seeing them at that time.

00:29:39 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And there was--was there anywhere else in L.A you were seeing experimental films, too, or just [unintelligible]?

00:29:45 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Good question. Yes, I also saw a lot of these films and filmmakers at The Western Theater that Michael Getz was running on Western Avenue.

00:29:59 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Movies 'Round Midnight?

00:30:03 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Movies 'Round Midnight, yes. When I first came to Hollywood, even though Hollywood was this--the center of filmmaking community, I still felt like I was in a filmmaking desert because I was interested more in foreign and experimental films than i was in the American Hollywood product at that time. And I think the Movies Around Midnight at The Western Theater [ed: The Cinema Theater on Western Ave] was already in operation when I first got here. Because I started going there on Saturday nights as soon as I arrived in L.A. and meeting other filmmakers and film fans and film buffs and Michael Getz and well, we were talking about....

00:30:53 **MARK TOSCANO**

Stanton Kaye?

00:30:54 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

...Stanton Kaye, yeah, who did GEORG. And I think I met Peter Mays around that time and a few other local experimental filmmakers.

00:31:06 **ALISON KOZBERG**

What was it like to go to the movies there? What did you--what was the scene like at that theater?

00:31:14 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

I'm amazed that I could stay up so late in those days. The movies--there was Movies 'Round Midnight, but the show would usually begin about 12:30 and it might run for an hour or two so we would be getting out around 2:00. And then, we would all wander off to some all night coffee shop where we would have breakfast and talk about the movies and then head home. So it was a lot of fun.

00:31:42

ALISON KOZBERG

And did you--were you and Getz in communication once you started programming at the Cinematheque 16? Did you share ideas? Did you work with the same distributors? Or was there not overlap between the two of you?

00:31:55

LEWIS TEAGUE

I must have. I mean, I was a friend of Mike Getz and we talked a lot and I must have gathered information from him. It's a great question because I sort of remember calling him and telling him what I wanted to do, to make sure that we wouldn't be in conflict with each other. And I don't remember this to be a fact, but you can ask him when you talk to him, but it seems to me that he was a bit concerned that I was going to drain off some of his business.

00:32:30

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And I don't know whether I did, in fact, or whether we just reinforced each other by building a larger film-going community--experimental film-going community. I really don't know. But I, yes, I do remember that Stan--Michael and I had some conversations about that.

00:32:51

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay. He was doing his screening on Saturdays, but you had screenings every day of the week.

00:32:55

LEWIS TEAGUE

We operated during normal hours. We opened up every night around 7:00 and depending on the length of the show, we'd have two or three shows, which meant we ended about 10:00, 11:00--between 10:00 and 11:30 usually.

00:33:14

ALISON KOZBERG

So for an Acid Film Trips film package, for example, you would screen at multiple times in one night and [unintelligible].

00:33:21

LEWIS TEAGUE

[overlapping] we'd have usually three screenings a night, but if the show was an hour and a half long, I'd try to construct the show so there would be about an hour and a half and then try to squeeze in three shows, which would take us--if it was an hour and a half, we'd run 'til about 11:30 if we opened and started around 7:00.

00:33:44

ALISON KOZBERG

And those were all--those were selling out, those were packed?

00:33:49

LEWIS TEAGUE

The initial Acid Film Trip series sold out. The initial Andy Warhol films sold out. But otherwise, not. We had a lot of slow nights.

00:34:02

ALISON KOZBERG

What were some of the initial Warhols you screened, do you remember?

00:34:06 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

No. I'd have to go back and research.

00:34:08 **ALISON KOZBERG**

I know you screened CHELSEA GIRLS.

00:34:10 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

What?

00:34:11 **ALISON KOZBERG**

You screened CHELSEA GIRLS, right?

00:34:13 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Yes.

00:34:14 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And then I'm not sure what other ones, either. Do you remember which films you screened as part of the Acid Film Trips or which, like, [unintelligible] films you screened?

00:34:25 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

No.

00:34:28 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Maybe some--I think some Whitney films, maybe Lockviews, but I'm not sure which others.

00:34:35 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Not in the initial Acid Film Trips because they were--they're California filmmakers, right, the Whitney brothers? And their initial programs were New York. Because I had put together what I called--before I changed the name, Exploited Acid Film Trips, they was called The Best of the New York Underground. So their first few shows were comprised all of New York filmmakers.

00:34:59 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Okay. And then, when did you start screening filmmakers from California?

00:35:06 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

When I ran out of New York filmmakers [interviewer laughs] and i forget how long that took.

00:35:10 **ALISON KOZBERG**

And how did you get...

00:35:11 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

No. I started meeting--once the theater opened filmmakers started contacting me to see they could--or filmmakers were being recommended to me.

00:35:23

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay.

00:35:23

LEWIS TEAGUE

And I don't remember at what point the Whitneys came into the picture, but I was a big fan of theirs. And I was a big fan theirs so once I learned about them and saw their films I certainly began programming them. I also learned it was bad for business to repeat films too frequently. I did that with the Acid Film Trips because the name was selling--the name of the program was selling tickets. But once people discovered that i was repeating films and filmmaker--films, they felt the shows were becoming kind of stale and I began losing business.

00:36:04

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And the problem was we ran out of films to show and the only films we had that were fresh and making money eventually were Warhol films and even Warhol factory was beginning to slow down and not crank them out fast enough. So that's why I left.

00:36:26

ALISON KOZBERG

What was the theater like? How big was it? Did you have regulars that you would tend to see?

00:36:30

LEWIS TEAGUE

Oh, okay. The theater was on Sunset Strip, near the intersection of Holloway and Sunset, across from what used to be Tower Records. And the basement of the building that you reach by walking down a narrow alley to the back of the building and entering from the rear. And it turned out, I learned later after doing a little research, that it used to be a mortuary. [interviewer laughs] And there was definitely--it was just--I'm sure there were ghosts there, but I'm not--

00:37:07

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

We had about 80 seats and it had one 16 millimeter projector with a Xenon bulb so the projection was pretty good. Projection was damn good and we had a good sound system. And we could either run sync sound, if the film arrived with a sound track on it, or I could run records and tapes and stuff. A lot of people were making silent films in those days and so I would just take the latest Rolling Stone album and play it full volume. Half the people were loaded and they just love that.

00:37:49

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

It was--the projection was good, but the theater had a curtain running down the center and on one side of the curtain was the projection portion of the room with about 80 seats and nice screen, good projector and a projection booth. And on the other side of the curtain, was a bar where I had a coffee set-up and sometimes bring in day-old bagels for people to eat. And there was a little cashier's booth and I went through a series of cashiers because they were all stealing money.

00:38:26

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

I would walk in and there would be 20 people in the theater and six dollars in the cashier's box and another cashier would bite the dust, at that point. A lot of pot smoking in and around the theater in those days and a lot of undercover cops were coming in all the time because the Sunset Strip was hippie haven. A lot of undercover cops coming in all the time pretending they wanted to buy drugs and asking me if I could--had any drugs for sale.

00:39:03

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So and I was never a big druggie so that was never a problem for me. We had a lot of rock and rollers hanging around, too. The theater became a gathering place for a lot of filmmakers. I always encouraged them just come in and hang out, have coffee and we'd shoot the shit. As I said before, Jim Morrison was studying film at UCLA at that time and he brought in a little film that he'd made for class, which really just consisted of himself lying on a rock playing with himself in the sun. [interviewer laughs]

00:39:40

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

Let's see. Janis Joplin was a big regular there. She'd hang around with a little paper bag twisted around the neck of her Wild Turkey bottle. And Jim Baker and a lot of other people like that.

00:39:57

ALISON KOZBERG

This is a good place to break because we need to change tapes.

end of tape 1

TAPE 2: LEWIS TEAGUE

00:40:07

ALISON KOZBERG

All right. So for the whole time you were working there, did Lippert retain ownership of the theater? Was he always around or did eventually you take over completely?

00:00:48

LEWIS TEAGUE

At some point while I was running the Cinematheque, Robert Lippert sold it to another guy, whose name I can't remember right now. It'll come back to me. And when business started going downhill in 1968, he wanted me to start programming more exploitive product--sexually exploitive product. And so I said that's not what I want to do and I left.

00:01:25

ALISON KOZBERG

Did Fred stay as your partner the entire time or how involved was he in the theater? He just introduced you to Lippert and then..

00:01:34

LEWIS TEAGUE

He just set it up as a friend.

00:01:36

ALISON KOZBERG

Okay.

00:01:37

LEWIS TEAGUE

He was [unintelligible] facilitate something interesting between me and Lippert in that theater.

00:01:46

ALISON KOZBERG

But he wasn't ever your partner onsite?

00:01:48

LEWIS TEAGUE

No.

00:01:48

ALISON KOZBERG

So you were--were you running the theater totally on your own then?

00:01:52

LEWIS TEAGUE

I was running it totally on my own, doing all the programming, all the advertising, running the projector, changing light bulbs, ordering the coffee, making the coffee, hiring and firing the cashiers.

00:02:07

ALISON KOZBERG

Did you have anyone else working with you, aside from cashiers?

00:02:18 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Yes. There were people that I would hire so I could occasionally take a night off. There were people I trained to run the projector, who could come in and fill in for a night or two. I had no partners in terms of programming, marketing or running the theater. But I did hire projectionists that could come in for one or two nights a week so I could have a break. And one of them, who was also a filmmaker, an experimental filmmaker, wound up taking over when I left. A guy named Jeff Perkins, does that name ring a bell?

00:02:51 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Yeah, we just--we did his--we just took his oral history as well, actually.

00:02:55 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

You what?

00:02:55 **ALISON KOZBERG**

We just interviewed Jeffrey, also.

00:02:57 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Oh, good. Well, he must have talked about that then.

00:02:59 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Yes. He talked about the theater, about the Cinematheque, also.

00:03:05 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

He just did a film on Sam Francis, right?

00:03:06 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Yes. It just played at Laemmle's two weekends ago.

00:03:10 **MARK TOSCANO**

Oh, did it?

00:03:10 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Yeah. [unintelligible]

00:03:14 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

He started shooting that film, I think it was about 20, 30 years ago.

00:03:18 **ALISON KOZBERG**

I think he worked on it for a very long time.

00:03:20 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Yeah. Jeff was a really interesting guy. I liked him a lot. Very creative soul and he had been working for me for a while as a projectionist and friend. And then when I left he took over. But I pretty much--I went back East at that point and cut my ties with the Cinematheque so I didn't really know what Jeff was doing there.

00:03:45

ALISON KOZBERG

How did you meet Jeff, do you remember?

00:03:52

LEWIS TEAGUE

I don't remember. He probably gravitated to the Cinematheque shortly after it opened as a filmmaker, artist, performance type of guy, he would have had an interest in that. And I remember meeting him in the early days.

00:04:10

ALISON KOZBERG

Do you remember there, in addition to the films you were screening in the late night kind of open projection, were there other kinds of performances or other kinds of projection you had there or usually just films?

00:04:28

LEWIS TEAGUE

I didn't do any other kind of performances myself, that I remember.

00:04:36

MARK TOSCANO

Did you have visiting filmmakers that were coming through town at all or like maybe a night of so-and-so's films or, you know, they'd be in town showing a package of stuff or...

00:04:49

LEWIS TEAGUE

I don't remember. I remember visiting filmmakers coming by. I remember when we first started programming Warhol's films, he would come out to be there and do maybe a TV--not a TV, but maybe an interview for the L.A. Free Press or something like that. I remember when we were showing our first Warhol show that he wanted to be in town and see how it would do. And I picked him up at the airport and it was him and his entourage. I think he was with Viva, Joe Delassandro, Paul Morrissey and a couple other people.

00:05:32

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And they were all pretty wild looking when I picked them up. And I had made hotel reservations at a hotel on the strip and when we got there and walked in the hotel wouldn't honor the reservations. And I was convinced it was because they looked so weird and they didn't know who Warhol was in those days. So we went around trying to find another hotel. And I said, I know a good hotel that you would like. And I took them to the Tropicana on Santa Monica Boulevard where Duke's used to be.

00:06:06

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

The original Duke--you know Dukes restaurant that's on Sunset Strip now? it's a great break--it used to be in the Tropicana motel. And there were different tiers of rock and roll hotels in those days and Tropicana was at the very bottom of the chain. But Warhol wound up loving it and for every time after that, when he'd come back to L.A, he'd stay at the Tropicana. That's my only memory about visiting filmmakers.

00:06:32

MARK TOSCANO

Would you remember any particularly memorable nights at the theater, whether they were unusual or just memorable or wild or exceptional somehow?

00:06:44

LEWIS TEAGUE

Not especially, no.

00:06:45

MARK TOSCANO

No? Okay.

00:06:49

ALISON KOZBERG

So how--so eventually, after you kind of changed the programming style then the theater was generally turning a profit. Do you remember any of the other--kind of the business side, how it was run? Do you mind giving us more details about kind of just running the theater?

00:07:07

LEWIS TEAGUE

About the business?

00:07:08

ALISON KOZBERG

Yeah.

00:07:08

LEWIS TEAGUE

Okay. Lippert sold it to this guy Frank, whose name I--last name I...

00:07:14

ALISON KOZBERG

Frank Woods?

00:07:15

LEWIS TEAGUE

Frank Wood, there you go. He sold it to Frank Woods and Frank Woods--I made a deal with him. I got a salary and a salary, a base salary, plus a percentage. So when the shows did well, I'd make more than my base salary. And Frank was very unhappy because when business started to go downhill, he wanted me to absorb some of the losses, too. And I wasn't interested in doing that. It was a marginal business for a long time. It was a marginal business. I was in charge of the programming and the marketing of the films and collecting money at the box office and depositing it in the bank.

00:08:01

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And giving all the reports to Frank. And Frank was in charge of paying all the bills, whether it was for food or electricity or whatever utilities there were. I know he was always late on the bills because I was--I'd have the creditors constantly hounding me at the door of the theater. So it wasn't a very profitable business. For every show that made money and filled up the house, there were 100 shows that barely made money or lost money. So it was not a gold mine by any stretch of the imagination.

00:08:46

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

For me, it was fun because it was a base--because I like movies, it was fun to program these films. And it was, as I say, the theater became a community center for filmmakers. And when you asked if there were any memorable nights, unfortunately, most of the memorable nights had nothing to do with showing movies, but with sex, drugs and rock and roll. And so that's--that was a lot of the attraction of running this theater for me.

00:09:24

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And it eventually it became really frustrating because I wanted to make movies, not just show other people's movies. And also, I wanted to have a life of my own. I was always working. It seemed like I was working from the time i--my schedule, when I was running the Cinematheque, was I'd wake up between 11:00 and noon every morning or afternoon as the case may be. Then I'd have to take care of maintenance of the theater, whether it was changing light bulbs or repairing the projector or getting ads--I had to get ads into the newspapers.

00:10:11

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And I had to call distributors back East before it got too late to get ideas for future programs. So there was a lot of work during the daytime. And then I had to open up the theater every night. I had to supervise the cashier and run the projector. And that was a lot of work 'cause the projector, the reels had to be changed every half hour or so. And there was always something going wrong in the theater that required maintenance. And so I'd be there 'til 11:30.

00:10:50

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So I put in 12 hours every day just working at the theater. Then, when we closed, I'd have a little bit of fun at the Whiskey or Barney's Beanery and after--we'd always wind up at Canter's. There was a group of us--there was always a gang of us at the theater, filmmakers and friends, and who would drift off to Barney's or the Whiskey and then there were always girls around, too. And that was fun. And then, there were celebrities that would come in, too.

00:11:20

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

One of the highlights was when Janis Joplin started hanging around there. And we'd always go to Canter's for breakfast after Barney's closed. So 2:30, we'd be at Canters on Fairfax, having breakfast 'til 3:30 or 4:00. And there were a lot of nights where I didn't get home until the sun started coming up. And it was fun for a while, but after awhile it got just too--it got boring, it became non profit--profitable, and I wanted to make movies. I wanted to have a life.

00:11:55 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

I wanted to be able to go out. I wanted to be able to go to regular movie theaters and see movies myself. And I wasn't. I must say, aside from looking at all the films that were showing in my theater, I was not--there were a lot of great films that were released during that period that I didn't get to see 'cause I had to run the theater. And that was frustrating so I was eventually glad to get out from under the burden of running that theater and start making movies and having a life of my own.

00:12:31 **MARK TOSCANO**

You said, at one point, that you were making some 16 millimeter stuff around this time.

00:12:35 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Yeah, I would always go out and--with a borrowed camera and short ends and shoot a little film or two or three. I have--I just had one transferred recently to VHS. If you guys have time before you leave, I'll show you. Because it's got some shots of the Cinematheque in there, too.

00:12:58 **MARK TOSCANO**

Oh, cool. Yeah, yeah, we'd love to see it.-

00:13:00 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

What I decided was so It was around '66, '67, that's when they first introduced the first--Nagra had come out a few years earlier with the first portable tape recorder for recording sound for movies, with a crystal controlled mechanism so it would stay in sync. And then, they came out with the first consumer cassette tapes around that time. And so I couldn't afford a Nagra, but I was wondering how long a consumer tape recorder would stay in sync with 16 millimeter film.

00:13:38 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And I was also going through this sort of break up period with a girlfriend that I was going with at that time. And I thought it would be fun to make a film about our relationship. And so I rented three Eclair cameras and I set them up in spots where I knew that we would be that weekend, including my bedroom, on the door of my car, on a sort of a hostess tray on the door of the car. And then, I had another one which I could move around and I could carry around where we went.

00:14:14 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And these cameras were all set up to be turned on and off with a remote control so that I could run the tape recorder continuously. And when I thought about something interesting, I could turn on the remote. She knew--my girlfriend knew that I was doing this. It wasn't secret. I wasn't sneaking this. But she was a very outgoing, exhibitionistic kind of person and she didn't care. She enjoyed it. So I cut together a five--it's about five or six minute long little film out of that.

00:14:52 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And part of it takes place in the Cinematheque so it might be interesting to look at. [interviewer laughs] So I was always doing something.

00:15:01 **MARK TOSCANO**

And that was before David Holzman's diary, too.

00:15:04 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

That was, yeah, before David Holzman's DIARY, after GEORG. It's sort of borrowing--actually borrowing from the same style, you know, where--I say in the movie, I think I'm going to start recording my whole life to figure out what's going on in this relationship, or something like that, yeah. And it's interesting because I'm doing a web show right now where I employ the same conceit, where this girl, at the very first shot in the movie, is holding a little still camera photographing herself saying, "I think I'm going to start recording my whole life to figure out how I got into this mess."

00:15:49 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And so I've ripped off GEORG, too, I guess. What else?

00:16:01 **ALISON KOZBERG**

Oh, I wanted to ask if you knew any--if you remembered any of the distributors that you'd worked with in New York or San Francisco or anyone else, besides Mike Getz, you might have been talking to while you were programming.

00:16:14 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

I remember the names of individuals, but the New Yorker theater had a--there was a distributor connected to the New Yorker theater. Do you know what I'm talking about?

00:16:25 **MARK TOSCANO**

Wouldn't it be New Yorker Films, probably, [unintelligible]?

00:16:28 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Yeah, they distributed films at that time. Yeah.

00:16:31 **MARK TOSCANO**

Because, yeah, that was their early period.

00:16:33

LEWIS TEAGUE

Yeah.

00:16:34

MARK TOSCANO

Like the Filmmakers Coop in New York, too. Did you...

00:16:38

LEWIS TEAGUE

Probably, yeah, that rings a bell, very much so.

00:16:43

MARK TOSCANO

I mean, Museum of Modern Art had a--had a...

00:16:46

LEWIS TEAGUE

Was the Filmmaker's Coop run by Jonas Mekas?

00:16:49

MARK TOSCANO

Yeah, at that time, yeah.

00:16:49

ALISON KOZBERG

Yeah.

00:16:50

LEWIS TEAGUE

Okay. Yes. I mean, I rented films from them, but they were really--not very many because they were too tough to deal with. They wanted too much money. And we were losing money. We would have never made much of a profit and they wanted too much money so I would rarely rent from them. And I found usually ways to get to the filmmaker and rent directly from them.

00:17:15

MARK TOSCANO

Like Warhol, you got directly from him?

00:17:18

LEWIS TEAGUE

Well, Warhol, definitely directly from him, yeah. But other than that, I don't remember any of the distributors that we dealt with.

00:17:29

ALISON KOZBERG

Are there any stories, particularly memorable nights, not involving film, like Canter's or Barney's Beanery that you would care to share? Any favorite memories or stories?

00:17:43

LEWIS TEAGUE

It was a fun period, I mean, we would--because that was the--that was also during the Vietnam war. And any time too many young people would begin to gather in any one place, the police and establishment found it threatening, would try to break it up. And at one point, there was a riot outside Canter's because the police tried to break up the crowds. Because it became--Canter's became a very popular place to go all of a sudden. And suddenly, there were hundreds and hundreds of people trying to get into to Canter's for breakfast and the L.A.P.D. sent down the riot police to clear the street and there were a lot of heads broken and that kind of stuff.

00:18:39

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

What else? They tried to clear out Sunset Strip for awhile, too. They prohibited parking and--on the strip. Let me think for a minute, I'm sorry.

00:19:02

ALISON KOZBERG

As far as the undercovers that came to Cinematheque 16, did you guys have any trouble with the police or with censorship of the films you screen or nothing like that?

00:19:12

LEWIS TEAGUE

No. We never showed anything pornographic and we never had it so we never had any problem on that score. I was not a druggie so they I think the vice squad gave up after awhile and left us alone. So I never had any legal problems while I was there.

00:19:37

ALISON KOZBERG

Do you remember where you were doing advertising or which newspapers you were working with?

00:19:42

LEWIS TEAGUE

I advertised in the--primarily in the LA FREE PRESS and also in the LA TIMES. I'd take out one ad in the LA TIMES, which was all we could afford prior to opening. And then, we would also advertise in the FREE PRESS. And Kevin Thomas, who was a film reviewer at the LA TIMES, who was very sympathetic to what we were doing, would come down and review every show. And that was very helpful.

00:20:13

ALISON KOZBERG

Were you doing press screening for him or would he just come to the show with everybody else?

00:20:19

LEWIS TEAGUE

He would come to the show with everybody else because usually I wouldn't get the programs together in time to preview them.

00:20:25

ALISON KOZBERG

What about Gene Youngblood in the LA FREE PRESS, was he coming to the theater or you don't remember that?

00:20:35

LEWIS TEAGUE

Gene, yeah, but I don't remember whether gene Youngblood actually reviewed any of the shows, but he would come into the theater. Yes. Is he still around?

00:20:48

ALISON KOZBERG

He is around.

00:20:51

LEWIS TEAGUE

What's he doing?

00:20:52

MARK TOSCANO

[overlapping] in New Mexico. He just--he retired from teaching at a college in Santa Fe a couple years ago.

00:20:56

LEWIS TEAGUE

I have a bone to pick with that guy.

00:20:58

MARK TOSCANO

[overlapping] what's that?

00:20:59

LEWIS TEAGUE

Gene Youngblood. [interviewer laughs] Once I began directing, I did a couple of films. I did LADY IN RED for Roger Corman, and then I did a film called ALLIGATOR that John Sayles wrote the script for. And then, I did a film for Dino DeLaurentis, called FIGHTING BACK. And then, I got a call from a producer named Dan Blatt. And Dan called me and he said, Stephen King recommended you for this film because he saw your film ALLIGATOR. You want to come in and meet?

00:21:49

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So I went in to do CUJO, to direct CUJO. So I went in to meet Dan Blatt and we got along great. To this day, he is the best producer I've ever worked with. And we talked about the script. Stephen King had written the first draft and then asked me what I thought about it. And I thought--it's got to be rewritten, it's no good. What we should do is go back to the book. And Dan agreed and so he submitted me to--Now, I've got to be careful here because I want to make sure I've got my facts straight.

00:22:26

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

I believe--maybe I can get myself off the hook by saying I could be wrong. But I believe that Gene Youngblood was in charge of acquisitions at Twentieth Century Fox at that time for films. Do you know anything about his history and...

00:22:45

MARK TOSCANO

No. I mean, I know he--I don't know how long he taught in Sante Fe, but he was definitely in L.A. through the '70s. He taught at [unintelligible] a little bit. I don't know how much..

00:22:55

LEWIS TEAGUE

When I met him, he was--when I met him in the '60's he was teaching. And I thought he was as USC, but I could be wrong. I wonder if he--if I can...

00:23:05

MARK TOSCANO

I've never heard that he had any industry connections, necessarily.

00:23:10

LEWIS TEAGUE

Well, I'm going to try to--before I say any more I'm going to spend a second here trying to double-check this by googling him. [interviewer laughs] Gene. Because he and I--I do remember meeting him and the Cinematheque and I do remember that he put together a seminar on Jean Luc Godard at USC that he invited me to attend and participate in.

00:23:48

MARK TOSCANO

Well, he would have been pretty young at the time of the Cinematheque.

00:23:51

LEWIS TEAGUE

Yeah.

00:23:54

MARK TOSCANO

Because had written EXPANDED CINEMA , he was only about 27 or something. So he would have been in his early mid-twenties.

00:24:03

LEWIS TEAGUE

Gene Youngblood is a theorist of media arts and politics and a respected scholar in the history and theory of alternative cinemas. Da, da, da, da, da.

00:24:18

MARK TOSCANO

Make sure it's the right Gene.

00:24:19

LEWIS TEAGUE

Maybe I'm mixing him up with someone else. I do not want to--I might be confusing him with somebody else. So maybe I don't have a--Gene, I'm sorry. [interviewer laughs] I got you confused with somebody else.

00:24:45

ALISON KOZBERG

So because we're kind of moving in that direction. Let's talk about how you...

00:24:52

MARK TOSCANO

I have one question. If I could ask one more question about the Warhol stuff.

00:24:56

LEWIS TEAGUE

Yeah.

00:24:56

MARK TOSCANO

In the course of the [unintelligible] you were saying [unintelligible] like talking to a bunch of filmmakers. And I'm wondering, were they really showing here at all before you started showing them or...

00:25:11

LEWIS TEAGUE

No.

00:25:11

MARK TOSCANO

So you seem to be the exclusive outlet.

00:25:14

LEWIS TEAGUE

Wait. They were. Mike Getz, I think--I think Mike Getz showed CHELSEA GIRLS at the Western before I ran it. So they would have--they would have been able to see at least CHELSEA GIRLS at the Western.

00:25:30

MARK TOSCANO

But you were showing quite a few?

00:25:34

LEWIS TEAGUE

I wound up showing a lot, yeah.

00:25:37

ALISON KOZBERG

Do you remember a lot of filmmakers coming to the screenings?

00:25:43

LEWIS TEAGUE

No. that's why I'd like to set up--there's a lot of people interested in films, but I don't--that's why I said I'd like to set up a fans of Cinematheque website on Facebook to see how many filmmakers come out of the woodwork and say that, oh, yeah, yeah, i saw--I used to go there.

00:26:04

ALISON KOZBERG

So you left the Cinematheque in the late '60's, you said?

00:26:11

LEWIS TEAGUE

1968, yeah.

00:26:13

ALISON KOZBERG

And that was right when you were getting back into making films yourself?

00:26:16

LEWIS TEAGUE

A friend of mine, Don Devlin, asked me to work as his associate. He was producing--he had written and was producing a film called LOVING [1970] that Irv Kershner directed back East and he asked as his associate on that. So I went back East and worked on that movie. While I was there, I met Mike Wadley who asked me to partner with him on--he wanted to do a rock and roll film, concert film utilizing--he was the first one to start bringing in the Keller editing machines, called KEMs, which were a flat bed with three screens so you could look at three images simultaneously.

00:26:55 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

He was doing an Aretha Franklin concert film for TV at that time and he was using a KEM to edit. And he was saying it would be exciting to do a three screen movie and I agreed. So he asked me to produce it for him and we tried to set up a concert at one of the stadiums back in New York City unsuccessfully. And around that time--no, actually, I met Michael before I worked on Loving and we were trying to set up the concert when the--I was offered that job on Loving.

00:27:38 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And I said, I'm going to go do Loving. And I introduced him to a friend of mine that I'd grown up with in Terrytown, New York, called Bob Maurice, who wound up producing Woodstock. And by the time the Woodstock began to materialize, I'd finished Loving and so Bob asked me if I would work on it. So I was one of the production managers on Woodstock.

00:28:07 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And then, I did that, then I did a film in India. And then, I came back and I got at a job at KCT taking over their film department, making documentaries. I did that for several years. And while I was at KCT directing documentaries, I was always trying to figure out a way to work my way back into the film business. And I met Roger Corman and edited a bunch of films for him, then directed second in a bunch of films for Roger until he gave me the opportunity to direct my first feature, THE LADY IN RED.

00:28:56 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And then, once that came out and was successful, I stopped doing everything else and just directed films for the next 30 years, roughly. Yeah, it's been about 30 years.

00:29:13 **ALISON KOZBERG**

I'm getting a little bit of that sound.

00:29:14 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

Oh, I'm sorry. [interviewer laughs]

00:29:17 **ALISON KOZBERG**

What was Roger like?

00:29:18 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

What was he like and what is he like. He's a very smart guy. He's got a great eye for talent and he's really articulate and he likes to make money making movies. And he's very good at it. He said to me once, he said, Lewis, you know, I'll never lose money on film as long as I have the right title and a low enough budget. [interviewer laughs] He later admitted that he was wrong about that.

00:29:51 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

I worked on a film called COCKFIGHTER that Monte Hellman directed. You ever seen that?

00:30:00 **MARK TOSCANO**

Love that film.

00:30:02 **ALISON KOZBERG**

I'm not going to lie.

00:30:01 **LEWIS TEAGUE**

What--it's really well done, but what a strange idea for a movie, about a guy who's taken a vow of silence, you know. So Warren Oates just walks around mugging for the camera for an hour and a half. And Roger thought, well, I've got a great title, COCKFIGHTER, cock fighting is really big in the South, really big. And we'll keep the budget down and I got a great cast. And I--what Monte--I edited it with Monte Hellman.

00:30:31 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And when it was finished and released in the South in drive-ins, I started cleaning out the editing room and I was cleaning out the editing room and I got a call from Roger saying, Lewis, I was wrong. Nobody in the South wants to see cockfighting movies. He said, I've the wrong title. He said, I've got to change the title and I want to re-do the trailer. He said, I want to get every shot of sex and violence and give it to Joe.

00:31:09 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

Joe Dante was in the next room cutting trailers for Roger at that time. So I want you to give Joe every shot of sex and violence that you can possibly find. And I said, Roger, Monte didn't shoot any sex and violence in this movie. And Roger said, I don't care where you get it, I just want you to give Joe a lot of sex and violence. Now, Roger had done a lot of genre films, including student nurse films and stuff like that.

00:31:35 **LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)**

And so I went through all--through his library of other films and found shots of student nurses pulling up their blouses and police cars careening around corners and cars exploding. And I gave those shot to Joe Dante to cut a new trailer. And I called Roger back and I said, Roger, you know, I don't feel right about this. I don't think it's right to put shots in the trailer that aren't in the movie. Roger said, you know, you're right. Put it in the movie.

00:32:13

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So there used to be a scene where Warren Oates fell asleep and it faded out and he wakes up the next morning to the birds chirping. Now, he falls asleep and he dreams about student nurses pulling open their blouses and police cars careening around corners. So Roger--I mean, there--somebody--well, you guys, have you done an oral history with Roger Corman?

00:32:35

MARK TOSCANO

No. I mean, we've...

00:32:37

LEWIS TEAGUE

Or you should just do a movie about Roger Corman. Get all those guys that have worked--so many directors have gone through the Roger Corman factory that have great stories to tell about him.

00:32:48

ALISON KOZBERG

Somebody's got to have already have done that. There must...

00:32:51

MARK TOSCANO

[overlapping] he's been interviewed here and there, but probably not exhaustively.

00:32:53

LEWIS TEAGUE

No one's really put together a story with Joe Dante and John Davison and Alan Arkish and all the funny, funny guys that can tell these stories really well. You know, there's so many. He's--but he was smart. He had an eye for talent and He--John Sayles had won the Macarthur Genius Award and somebody had recommended him and so he got John to write a few scripts for him. And the first script that John wrote and Roger gave to me and I said, okay, I'll direct it, I'm really, really glad that Roger cancelled that project.

00:33:30

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

It was something like BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS or something. Somebody else went on to direct it, but he--it was a complicated special effects movie. And so in the meantime, John has written another story, THE LADY IN RED, which was sort of a feminist version of the Dillinger story. And so he asked me if I wanted to direct that instead, which was--I was very lucky that that happened because it gave me a chance to do what I can do well, which is just sort of a gangster action film with really people in it and not have to deal with special effects and stuff.

00:34:17

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

But so many people have started off with Roger Corman. And I learned a lot about working with creative people from him. He was great because once he gave me the script and agreed on the lead or tudes [sic] that he would use to market the movie, he gave me totally free rein to cast the film, to plan it and shoot it. He would show up--Roger, traditionally, would show up on the set on the first day of production to make sure that everything was running smoothly and then he would disappear.

00:35:02

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And I wouldn't hear from him again until I'd finished my first cut of the movie. And then he would look at it and his notes would be very thorough, very comprehensive, very smart. And he would go a ten--and I learned this, actually, when I was editing for him, before I directed. He would sit down and look at the first cut of a movie, take--fill about seven or eight pages of a legal pad, then everyone would march back to his office from the screening room and he would start off the meeting the same way.

00:35:39

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

He'd say, we've got a great movie in there somewhere. And then he would say, I'm now going to give you my notes and I only expect you or require you to deal with about 80 to 85 percent of them. And then he would start going through--knowing that a lot of the problems that he was going to mention we already know about, we'd probably already addressed and maybe done the best we could with them. But then he would go through all his notes, all six, eight pages of legal pad notes and never comment on a problem without offering one or two solutions.

00:36:16

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

And it was wonderful. It was clear. It was concise. And then, we'd march back to the editing room and we'd start addressing his notes and work on them. So he was--I learned a lot from him. I learned a lot about movie making and administrating and being a leader and working with creative people and that kind of stuff.

00:36:47

ALISON KOZBERG

Did you--a couple more quick questions or one more quick question on this tape. Did you feel influenced by any of the underground or experimental films you'd seen before your time at NYU when you were working with Roger or was it a totally different experience?

00:37:09

LEWIS TEAGUE

I wasn't directly influenced by any of the underground filmmakers in my style. As I said earlier, I was influenced more by Jean Luc Godard and Albert Maysles than anybody else. But I was influenced by the freedom of spirit evident by underground filmmakers. I never saw a technique that I said, oh, that's really great and I want to borrow that and use it in my movies. But I really was affected by the freedom to experiment and the spirit of making your own movies, instead of having to adhere to a conventional template, which has been established in the '30s of masters and close-ups and that kind of stuff.

00:38:01

LEWIS TEAGUE (CONTINUED)

So I was affected by the freedom of spirit, but not by anything specific that I can remember.

00:38:12

ALISON KOZBERG

Should we...end of this tape.

00:38:14

LEWIS TEAGUE

Okay.

end of tape 2